



Provided by the author(s) and University of Galway in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite the published version when available.

Title	'Farmers don't retire': Re-evaluating how we engage with and understand the 'Older' farmer's perspective
Author(s)	Conway, Shane Francis; Farrell, Maura B.; McDonagh, John; Kinsella, Anne
Publication Date	2022-02-22
Publication Information	Conway, S. F., Farrell, M., McDonagh, J., & Kinsella, A. (2022). 'Farmers Don't Retire': Re-Evaluating How We Engage with and Understand the 'Older' Farmer's Perspective. <i>Sustainability</i> , 14(5), 2533. https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052533
Publisher	MDPI
Link to publisher's version	https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052533
Item record	http://hdl.handle.net/10379/17882
DOI	http://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052533

Downloaded 2024-04-30T09:07:34Z

Some rights reserved. For more information, please see the item record link above.



Commentary

'Farmers Don't Retire': Re-Evaluating How We Engage with and Understand the 'Older' Farmer's Perspective

Shane Francis Conway ^{1,*}, Maura Farrell ¹, John McDonagh ¹ and Anne Kinsella ²

¹ Rural Studies Centre, Discipline of Geography, School of Geography, Archaeology and Irish Studies, National University of Ireland Galway, Galway H91 TX33, Ireland; maura.farrell@nuigalway.ie (M.F.); john.mcdonagh@nuigalway.ie (J.M.)

² Agricultural Economics and Farms Surveys Department, Mellows Campus, Teagasc Co., Athenry H65 R718, Ireland; anne.kinsella@teagasc.ie

* Correspondence: shane.conway@nuigalway.ie

Abstract: Globally, policy aimed at stimulating generational renewal in agriculture is reported to pay meagre regard to the mental health and wellbeing of an older farmer, overlooking their identity and social circles, which are inextricably intertwined with their occupation and farm. This paper, in probing this contentious issue, casts its net across what could be deemed as disparate literatures, namely connected to transferring the family farm and social gerontology, in order to determine what steps could be taken to reassure older farmers that their sense of purpose and legitimate social connectedness within the farming community will not be jeopardised upon handing over the farm business to the next generation. A number of practical 'farmer-sensitive' actions that can be taken at both policy and societal level are subsequently set forth in this paper to help ease the fear and anxiety associated with 'stepping aside' and retirement from farming amongst older farmers. A particular focus is placed on social and emotional wellbeing benefits of being a member of a social group reflecting farmer-relevant values and aspirations in later life. The potential of the multi-actor EIP-AGRI initiative and the long-established livestock mart sector in facilitating the successful rollout of a social organisation designed to fit the specific needs and interests of the older generation of the farming community is then outlined. In performing this, the paper begins a broad international conversation on the potential of transforming farming into an age-friendly sector of society, in line with the World Health Organization's (WHO) age-friendly environments concept.

Keywords: family farm; older farmers; retirement; succession; wellbeing; identity; social gerontology; age-friendly environments; innovation; rural sustainability



check for updates

Citation: Conway, S.F.; Farrell, M.; McDonagh, J.; Kinsella, A. 'Farmers Don't Retire': Re-Evaluating How We Engage with and Understand the 'Older' Farmer's Perspective. *Sustainability* **2022**, *14*, 2533. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14052533>

Academic Editor: Marc A. Rosen

Received: 17 November 2021

Accepted: 16 February 2022

Published: 22 February 2022

Publisher's Note: MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2022 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

Global demographic trends highlight an inversion of the age pyramid with those aged 65 years and over, constituting the fastest growing sector of the farming community [1,2]. This 'greying' of the farming workforce necessitates an infusion of 'new blood' into the agricultural industry by means of efficient and effective intergenerational farm succession and land mobility (i.e., transfer of land from one farmer to another or from one generation to the next) in order to ensure future prosperity of the farming sector, as well as long-term sustainability of food production systems [3,4].

Extensive research on social and emotional issues affecting older farmers [5–8] highlights, however, their overwhelming desire to remain actively engaged in farming in later life as it is central to their sense of self and belonging in the farming community. The prospect of surrendering professional and personal identity upon transferring managerial control of the farm to the next generation and in some cases retiring, as advised in Europe's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), for example, is a concept that older farmers find difficult to accept. In fact, there appears to be a cultural expectation within the farming community that 'farmers don't retire' [5]. Lobley et al. added that the most common

approach to farm retirement may not actually be retirement per se but rather remaining in situ and ‘continuing day-to-day involvement’ on the farm, albeit with a reduction in some of the ‘more arduous tasks’ [9] (p. 51). In addition, farmers often wish to remain ‘rooted in place’ on the farm and, in many cases, have developed few interests outside of farming, further reinforcing their reluctance to step away from farming in later life [10]. Price and Evans go so far as to describe farmers as being so deeply embedded in the ‘cultural and physical spaces of farming’, that they ‘cannot imagine a different way of life’ [11] (p. 6). For those farmers who have retired, challenges are also present, with Riley [12] identifying adverse effects that the transition process has had on their lives. Riley explained that the cessation of occupational engagement ‘not only left voids in terms of time and empty routine structures, but also the loss of a lens through which they channelled very particular understandings of, and relationships with, specific places and practices’ [12] (p. 23). Riley further added that retirees felt ‘lost’ upon ceasing their ‘association with, and everyday routines and actions within’, the farm space [13] (p. 770).

The challenges that this presents are not insignificant. Globally, it could be argued that generational renewals in agriculture policymakers, and key stakeholders, are preoccupied with developing strategies and interventions to encourage older farmers to ‘step aside’ to facilitate young farmers who want to establish a career in farming. Such strategies, however, pay scant regard to the mental health and wellbeing of senior generations ignoring as it does their identity and social circles which are inextricably intertwined with their occupation and farm [14,15]. This paper, in probing this global issue, casts its net across what could be deemed as disparate literatures (transferring the family farm and social gerontology) in order to determine what, if any, steps could or should be taken to minimise the disconnect between policy and realities on the ground. In particular, the paper focuses on practical actions that can be taken at both policy and societal levels to reassure older farmers that their sense of purpose and legitimate social connectedness within the farming community will not be jeopardised upon handing over the farm business to the next generation. In performing this, we begin a broad international conversation on the place of older farmers in society in general and the part this plays in generational renewal and broader agriculture policy narratives.

This paper, by interrogating agricultural policy responses to an ageing farming population, considers potential strategies and interventions to help ease the fear, anxiety and stress associated with intergenerational farm succession amongst the older generation of the farming community. A particular focus is placed on the wellbeing benefits of being a member of a social group reflecting farmer relevant values and aspirations in later life. The extent to which older farmers themselves can be involved in the coproduction of a comprehensive set of ‘farmer-sensitive’ generational renewal policies and practices at the farm level, which respond to their needs and concerns in later life, will also be explored. This process, we argue, can have a global reach and could be extended in various ways to other farming communities.

This insight is particularly timely in the current COVID-19 pandemic as rural communities prepare to adapt, rebuild and reenergize as part of their crisis recovery plans. Social isolation measures brought into effect in an effort to curb the spread of the virus have further highlighted the importance of ensuring social inclusion for the elderly population (including older farmers) of society [16,17]. Indeed, the United Nations [18] has recently highlighted how support networks, such as retirement groups, played a valuable and beneficial role in ensuring and securing the wellbeing of older people during these difficult times.

The next section reviews pertinent family farm transfer and social gerontology literature published over the past forty years. Connecting these fields of study is paramount in fulfilling the overall purpose of this paper, as a wealth of peer-reviewed social gerontology journal articles and edited book chapters exists on age-related changes in social activity and engagement in later life, whereas its counterpart from a farming perspective is largely absent. This is followed by a series of agri-social policy recommendations aimed at address-

ing the older generation of the farming community's social and emotional wellbeing and what this might look like in any future vision for rural society.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Greying' of the Farming Workforce*

The 'greying' of the farming workforce is a pressing issue throughout the world. In Europe, for example, almost one-third of all farmers are older than 65 [2]. This raises obvious concerns about the survival, continuity and future of the agricultural industry as well as the broader sustainability of the rural society [1,7]. The situation in the Republic of Ireland is closely analogous to that of its European counterparts; in 2016, 30% of Irish farm holders were under 65 years and over [19]. Similarly, in the USA, the most recent Census of Agriculture carried out in 2017 found that 34% of farmers are aged 65 and older [20]. Indeed, this census also highlights that the average age of farmers in the USA is now 57.5 years, up 1.2 years from 2012, continuing a long-term trend of ageing in the U.S. farming population (ibid).

The senior generation's reluctance and indeed resistance to alter the status quo of the existing management and ownership structure of the family farm, to help facilitate generational renewal in agriculture, is undoubtedly strong within the farming community [7,21]. The reasons why older farmers fail to plan, effectively and expeditiously, for the future are expansive and range from the potential loss of identity, status and power that may occur as a result of engaging in the process to the intrinsic, multilevel relationship farmers have with their farms. The common denominator, however, is that intergenerational farm transfer is about emotion. The so-called 'soft issues', i.e., the emotional and social issues [6], are the issues that distort and dominate the older generation's decisions on the future trajectory of the farm. Such issues have resulted in intractable challenges for farm succession and retirement policy over the past fifty years. As such, far from being the 'soft issues', these really are the 'hard issues'. Similar findings from a collaborative research effort called the International FARMTRANSFERS Project, yielding a range of (largely quantitative) data relating to the pattern; process and speed of farm succession; retirement and inheritance that has been undertaken in 11 countries and 7 states in the USA and completed by almost 16,000 farmers throughout the world, highlights the global scale of such concerns [22]. Farming is a way of life for many older farmers throughout the world and there can be detrimental consequences to their emotional wellbeing if they are 'cut off' from their daily routines on the farm and social circles in the farming community [22–24]. Riley suggests that the 'indivisibility of social and occupational spaces' within the farming community leaves farmers feeling isolated or like 'an outsider' within previously 'familiar and comfortable spaces' following retirement [13] (p. 769). Such concerns are more prevalent than ever in the context of increased levels of social isolation and loneliness in rural communities due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2. *Social Isolation in Later Life*

It is widely acknowledged in social gerontology research that social isolation and withdrawal from active engagement is a common occurrence in later life [25–27]. Social isolation is defined as an absence or shortage of social interaction and connections between an individual and the rest of society [28]. Disengagement from society in later life largely occurs due to a decrease in one's social participation or loss of identity upon ceasing formal employment (ibid). Previous research carried out by Berg and Cassells highlight the negative impacts social isolation can have on the older population's psychological functioning as they struggle to cope with changes in their lives, particularly post-retirement [29]. This major life transition can potentially result in significant challenges to an individual's health and wellbeing due to its association with increased isolation and loneliness [30]. Older people in rural areas are reported to be the most vulnerable, at-risk segment of the population with regards to social isolation, as they generally have smaller social networks and are more likely to be living by themselves [16,31,32]. Within this subset of older people in rural

areas, we have the older farming population and the particular challenges they face and indeed the possibilities they can offer by connecting to a social environment that reflects their own values and aspirations [30].

2.3. Active Social Engagement

Social gerontologists and psychologists have been exploring the relationship between social activity, life satisfaction and healthy ageing since the 1970s. Lemon et al., for example, explained that the social self emerges and is sustained in a most basic manner through interaction with others and structural constraints, which limit or deny contacts with the environment and tend to be alienating and demoralizing [33]. Rowe and Kahn highlighted that continued social participation is one of three major elements of successful ageing, along with a low prevalence of illness and high physical and cognitive capabilities [34]. Rowe and Kahn also added that active social engagement in later life involves maintaining close relationships as well as remaining involved in activities that are meaningful and purposeful [34]. This ideal very much reflects the challenges facing the older farming community. Social relationships are observed to help negate negative feelings, with knock-on effects for physical health in the longer term, particularly within rural communities [35]. Indeed, social integration and inclusion for older people can have a profound impact on one's psychological wellbeing in later life [36,37].

2.4. The Importance of a Social Group in Later Life

The fundamental role that membership of a social group can play in protecting the physical and mental wellbeing of the older generation is well documented in social gerontology research [35,36,38,39]. Steffens et al. (2016) explained how older people derive a sense of self-esteem, purpose, acceptance and belonging in later life if they participate in broader social groups. The WHO add that becoming a member of a social group, and the subsequent meaningful activities that materialise upon doing so in a social context, can enhance one's quality of life in old age [40]. Greaves and Farbus and Crabtree et al. also highlighted that membership of a locally integrated social network helps combat and reduce social isolation amongst the older generation by providing them with an outlet to reconnect with their community in later life [36,41]. Spurgin added that membership in social groups was especially important for older people adapting to significant and anxiety provoking life transitions such as retirement [42]. Steffens et al. explained that being a member of a social group post-retirement not only has the potential to increase an older person's overall quality of life but also may increase life expectancy, due to the profound benefits they hold for self-identity, self-esteem, resilience and mental health [30]. The effectiveness of social groups and active retirement organisations in enhancing social networks and improving the psychological and physical wellbeing of older people is also widely reported in an Irish context [35,43]. One such successful social group in existence in Ireland is Men's Sheds, an organisation which first emerged in Australia in the 1990s as a response to the increasing concerns about men's health [44]. Crabtree et al. found that Men's Sheds not only improved older men's levels of social interaction but also enhanced their optimism and willingness to make a positive difference to their own lives [44]. Ni Leime et al. added that membership of a social group in later life also encourages older people to engage in activities that they would not have otherwise engaged in, adding a new dimension to their lives [43].

2.5. Disconnected Policy Efforts

Evidence from social gerontology research regarding the mental health and wellbeing benefits of continued social inclusion and participation in later life brings to the fore the risks associated with strategies and interventions aimed at facilitating intergenerational farm transfer, such as the most recent largely unsuccessful Early Retirement Scheme for farmers in Ireland (ERS 3), which required farmers to intend to retire under a scheme to 'cease agricultural activity forever' [45]. Such a sentiment fails to take into account the

emotional and social welfare of older farmers. Indeed, a recent report by the European Commission evaluating the impact of the CAP on generational renewal, local development and jobs in rural areas criticised the appropriateness of such Early Retirement Scheme (ERS) measures and called for an increased focus on mechanisms that help older farmers enhance their 'quality of life by exploring possibilities under social policy' [46] (p. 48). Such recommendations came almost forty years after the late Dr. Patrick (Packie) Commins first stressed that farm retirement policy should not focus on 'economic objectives' alone and should 'not ignore possible social consequences or wider issues of human welfare' in the early 1970s, however [47].

It is now imperative that policymakers crafting generational renewal strategies, and key stakeholders, finally recognise and appreciate the enormous value added to older farmer's personal lives and social circles through active engagement in farming in later life. Taking this route, the recommendations set forth in the next section will not only help address the intergenerational farm succession difficulties but will also protect the health and wellbeing of older farmers in the context of their own rural future.

3. Recommendations

In the face of such academic and popular support for active social engagement and social membership in later life within social gerontology research, it is surprising, therefore, that there are no social groups currently in existence in the agricultural sector that specifically represent the needs and interests of the older farmers. This paper recommends the establishment of a national social organisation, akin to that in place for young farmers in rural Ireland, i.e., Macra na Feirme, for the older generation of the farming community. Such an organisation would be a hugely positive step forward and could be a key method for policy to respond positively to the ageing farming population. In the following sections, focusing solely on the Irish example, we outline how such an organisation in a farming context might be set up and ultimately the role it could play in protecting the mental health and wellbeing of the older generation of the farming community. This we believe is particularly timely in an era of increased international attention on rural sustainability and the necessity of stimulating generational renewal in the farming sector through intergenerational farm succession and retirement.

3.1. Establishment of a National Social Organisation for Older Farmers

From an Irish viewpoint, a national social organisation for older farmers, funded annually by the Government and through membership, would provide older farmers with a sense of purpose and legitimate social connectedness within the farming community, thus helping to ease anxiety and stresses associated with the intergenerational farm succession process. Furthermore, involvement in such an organisation would help alleviate concerns around the fear of the unknown upon doing so by having an outlet to remain embedded 'inside' the agricultural sphere in later life. A nationwide social organisation, with a network of clubs in every county (or similar geographic entity), would also promote social inclusion in farming by allowing older farmers to integrate within the social fabric of a local age peer group (Macra na Feirme in Ireland have approximately 200 clubs in 31 regions). Membership of such a group would provide opportunities to develop a pattern of farming activities suited to advancing age through increased collaboration with farmers at a similar stage of their lives. This would contribute to an overall sense of happiness and self-worth, amidst the gradual diminishment of physical capacities on the farm. Such peer-to-peer collegiality and comradeship would be particularly beneficial for farmers living alone or for those who do not have successor in situ to take over the farm.

Despite the widely reported successful health and wellbeing benefits of the aforementioned Men's Sheds movement for older men [41], this paper advises that this proposed national social organisation for older farmers would be open to all within the farming community, thus helping dismantle the patriarchal nature of family farming identified in

previous research [48–51]. The gender diversity of such a social group would also help bring about increased levels of social inclusion amongst older women involved in farming.

Similarly to Macra na Feirme, this body for older farmers, with their added wealth of experience, would also act as a social partner farm organisation. The organisation in turn could collaborate with the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), for example, which would allow them to have regular access to government ministers and senior civil servants, thus providing older farmers with a voice to raise issues of concern through active participation and engagement with stakeholder groups. Indeed, such a group could be invaluable with regard to the development of future farm transfer strategies that would be cognisant of the human side of the process of generational renewal for example. An established organisation for older farmers would allow this sector of society to have a representative on important committees, such as the Board of Teagasc (similar to their younger counterparts). Such a feeling of belonging, inclusivity and position in society will undoubtedly contribute to the senior generation's general satisfaction and wellbeing in later life. A plethora of social gerontology studies indicate that activities and interventions, which promote active engagement, encourage creativity and facilitate social contact, have positive effects on one's health and wellbeing in later life, with knock-on effects for physical health in the longer term [36,43,52].

Collaborating with younger counterparts in Macra na Feirme on campaigns and activities through such a social organisation would help the senior generation of the farming community retain a sense of purpose and value. Consequently, the younger generation of farmers can learn from the older generation's invaluable store of local knowledge developed over years of regularised interaction and experience working in the farming sector. Such 'soil-specific human capital', as it is often referred to [53], is not easily transferable, communicated or learnable. It is highly plausible, for example, that the criteria of the recent Early Retirement Scheme in Ireland (ERS 3), requesting that 'continued participation in farming is not permitted' [38], had a profoundly negative effect on farm performance as it resulted in the loss of a number of experienced personnel from the agricultural sector. A national social organisation for older farmers has the potential to address such failings by facilitating the intergenerational exchange of agricultural knowledge and skills in a collaborative manner. It is a win-win situation in that such contributions would support a more viable, sustainable and vibrant agri-food and rural sector.

This proposed social organisation for older farmers would also, we argue, have the potential to create an age-friendly environment in the farming sector. The concept of age-friendly environments has garnered international attention among researchers, policy makers and community organisations since the World Health Organization (WHO) launched its Global Age-friendly Cities and Communities project in 2006. Although there is no universally accepted definition of an 'age-friendly' environment, the WHO defines an age-friendly community as one in which 'policies, services, settings and structures support and enable people to age actively' [54] (p. 5). Despite the growth of the age-friendly environments movement, existing literature is predominantly focused on a model of urban ageing that fails to reflect the broader diversity of rural areas and more significantly that of the farming community. The establishment of a social organisation for older farmers can help address this significant underrepresentation by generating a culture of appreciation and respect for their way of life, both within policy circles and society more generally. The rollout of such a group, while from initial viewing may seem challenging, upon closer inspection could be relatively easy to instigate. To this end, we would propose drawing on already existing conduits, namely that of the EIP-AGRI Operational Group Projects and the long-established livestock mart sector.

3.2. Rolling out a National Social Organisation for Older Farmers

Step 1: Formation of an EIP-AGRI Operational Group

The formation of an EIP-AGRI (European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural productivity and Sustainability) Operational Group, designed to fit the specific needs and

concerns of the senior generation of the farming community, would be a positive step in this process. A pilot study via the EIP-AGRI format would be an ideal stepping stone for the full implementation of a national social organisation for older farmers. The EIP-AGRI initiative was launched by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development's (DG-AGRI) in 2012 to contribute to the European Union's strategy 'Europe 2020' for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth [55]. As innovation under the EIP-AGRI initiative can be social as well as technological and nontechnological, such a multi-actor EIP-AGRI project led by a group of older farmers, in collaboration with farm advisory bodies, research institutions and organisations such as Age Action Ireland, has the potential to generate a comprehensive set of age-friendly policies and practices at the farm level. Furthermore, such an Operational Group has the potential to bring about much needed change in mindset and mannerisms of the farming community towards a range of contemporary concerns. This includes issues of land mobility and farm succession, but it would also help provide older farmers with a solid platform to become directly involved in the development and implementation of more 'farmer-sensitive' policies aimed at stimulating generational renewal in agriculture. Such measures would ultimately help bring about a culture within the farming community of recognising the importance of engaging in the farm succession planning process in a timely manner [7].

What this could also provide in terms of associated positive spin-off is the potential it would also have in addressing a significant challenge, namely that of health and safety on the farm. Farming is one of the most hazardous occupations in terms of the incidence and seriousness of accidental injuries [56]. Moreover, agriculture exhibits disproportionately high fatality rates, when compared to other sectors [57]. With 66% of farm fatalities in Ireland involving farmers aged 60 and over in 2019 for example [58], this phenomenon requires immediate policy intervention. Many are unwilling to recognize or accept their physical limitations on the farm [59] and, instead, continue to traverse spaces that would appear to be beyond their level of physiological competence [60], with subsequent risks to their health and safety. The general satisfaction and wellbeing that the older generation of the farming community attribute to the daily and seasonal labour-intensive demands of working on the farm in later life appears to be part of the farming psyche. As such, the establishment of a national social organisation for older farmers would provide the Health and Safety Authority (HSA) and member organisations of the HSA Farm Safety Partnership Advisory committee in the Republic of Ireland with an invaluable platform to directly engage with older farmers on the various actions to handle age-related physical limitations and barriers on their farms. The in-depth, farmer-focused, insights into the intrinsic link to farm attachment in old age and the importance attributed to the habitual routines within the farm setting made possible by interacting and collaborating with such an organisation for older farmers would aid HSA in the development of an effective health and safety service tailored specifically to the needs of older farmers.

Furthermore, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development's AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge and Innovation Systems) ecosystem acknowledges and recognises the need for EU Member States to include social innovation and inclusiveness within their AKIS knowledge exchange strategies and action plans [61]. Taking into account the range of rural socio-cultural contexts in their respective countries, this EIP-AGRI project for older farmers, tuned to the human side of farming in later life, will illustrate how policy, and indeed society more generally, can respond positively to the ageing farming population.

Step 2: Collaborating with the Livestock Mart Sector

A second stage in the formation of this new group, could stem from the livestock mart sector. The value attached to the social dimension of attending a livestock market is widely reported in the United Kingdom [62,63], and in Ireland, this sector consists of over 60 cooperative mart centres across the Irish countryside. These marts, we suggest, have the capacity and scale to help roll out a national social organisation for older farmers, albeit with some additional government supports that are probably necessary. In addition to their

primary function providing a consistent, stable and transparent method of buying and selling livestock through a guaranteed payment structure, marts also provide a vital social facility for the farming community, some of whom have no other social outlet [63]. Indeed, many older farmers rely on their weekly visit to the mart to meet friends, exchange ideas and to catch up on local news in an informal setting. This has almost grown in significance in recent years as many of the natural meeting points within rural communities have been removed due to the closure of post offices, pubs and local shops for example [64]. The bidding ring and canteen at livestock marts are, therefore, not considered to be only venues of transaction within the farming community but constitute hives of social interaction. This paper, therefore, proposes that livestock marts could be drawn on to help facilitate a national organisation as they have a considerable role already in terms of providing a social hub for the older generation of the farming community. Their existing positionality and reputation as a 'buzz' of activity within the heart of rural communities provide livestock marts with a ready-made platform and network to establish a social group membership of older farmers in their catchment area.

4. Conclusions

Overcoming the farming community's stalwart persistence in their adherence to traditional succession and retirement practices evident in previous family farm transfer research, which effectively obstruct the transfer of farmland from one generation to the next, is a pressing matter for contemporary generational renewal policy. This is not confined to one country but has a global dimension. Nonetheless, there is limited focus on the place of the older farmer within policy/academic discussion, even though this cohort ultimately has the resources and power to decide whether the transition takes place or not [21,65].

Consequently, there is an urgent need for agriculture policy makers and practitioners to re-examine their existing predominant focus on addressing the needs and requirements of the younger farming generation and to place a greater or equal emphasis on maintaining the quality of life of those most affected by the process, namely the older farmer. The recommendations set forth in this paper are, therefore, aimed at addressing older farmers' emotional and social wellbeing, as well as their sense of purpose in later life. We argue here for the establishment of a national social organisation for older farmers which would have the potential to transform farming into an age-friendly sector of society. Increasing evidence within social gerontology research on the benefits and importance of such social organisations on the lives of older people, particularly in relation to ensuring social inclusion in later years, reaffirms why there should be immediate support of such a venture in the farming sector. Making use of the extensive reach of the multi-actor EIP-AGRI initiative, allied to the platform that Ireland's livestock mart sector presents, has the potential to rollout such a national social organisation for the older generation of the farming community in an effective and efficient manner. Whilst our recommendations here are predominately geared towards influencing policy in the Republic of Ireland and its impact and success may be dependent on the cultural and institutional milieu that govern the mindset and mannerisms of Irish farmers in later life, this paper is also applicable in a much broader European and global settings.

While the establishment of such a social organisation for older farmers could be viewed as unnecessary and/or too idealistic, we need to remember that we all inevitably have to face the prospect of letting go of our professional tasks and ties in our old age. No one can avoid ageing, and as extensive research on the human dynamics affecting farm succession and retirement over the past decade has identified, the majority of older farmers opt to remain actively engaged in farming in later life in order to help ensure legitimate social connectedness within the farming community. The formation of a national social organisation for older farmers would provide older farmers with an outlet to engage with their peers and develop a pattern of farming activities suited to advancing age. Furthermore, it would offer the older generation of the farming community an ideal platform to become involved in the coproduction of a comprehensive set of age-friendly

policies and practices at farm level, which respond to their aspirations and needs in later life. Such insight and input will help inform future generational renewal in agriculture policy directions that understand the world as older farmers perceive it, and consequently prevent them from becoming isolated and excluded from society almost by accident rather than intention. Aligning such policies to the World Health Organization's (WHO) age-friendly environments concept will also induce a much broader international conversation on the place, views, concerns and challenges of older farmers in the context of the future viable of the agricultural sector and ultimately the future sustainability of rural families, communities and natural environments upon which we all depend.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, S.F.C., M.F. and J.M.; writing—review and editing, S.F.C., M.F., J.M. and A.K.; funding acquisition, S.F.C. All authors contributed to writing, editing and reviewing the draft submitted. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This study was funded by the NUI Galway College of Arts, Social Sciences and Celtic Studies Illuminate Programme.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Acknowledgments: The lead author would like to thank the Innovation Office at NUI Galway for their assistance with this study.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the review; the writing of the manuscript; or in the decision to publish the results.

References

1. Dwyer, J.; Micha, E.; Kubinakova, K.; Van Bunn, P.; Schuh, B.; Maucorps, A.; Mantino, F. *Evaluation of the Impact of the CAP on Generational Renewal, Local Development and Jobs in Rural Areas*; Technical Report; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2019.
2. Eurostat. *Agriculture Statistics at Regional Level, Statistics Explained*; Eurostat: Luxembourg, 2020.
3. Zagata, L.; Sutherland, L. A Deconstructing the 'young farmer problem in Europe': Towards a research agenda. *J. Rural Stud.* **2015**, *38*, 39–51. [[CrossRef](#)]
4. McDonagh, J.; Farrell, M.; Conway, S.F. The Role of Small-scale Farms and Food Security. In *Sustainability Challenges in the Agrofood Sector*; Bhat, R., Ed.; Wiley Blackwell: Hoboken, NJ, USA, 2017; pp. 33–47.
5. Conway, S.F.; McDonagh, J.; Farrell, M.; Kinsella, A. Cease agricultural activity forever? Underestimating the importance of symbolic capital. *J. Rural Stud.* **2016**, *44*, 164–176. [[CrossRef](#)]
6. Conway, S.F.; McDonagh, J.; Farrell, M.; Kinsella, A. Human dynamics and the intergenerational farm transfer process in later life: A roadmap for future generational renewal in agriculture policy. *Int. J. Agric. Manag.* **2019**, *8*, 22–30.
7. Conway, S.F.; Farrell, M.; McDonagh, J.; Kinsella, A. Going Against the Grain: Unravelling the Habitus of Older Farmers to Help Facilitate Generational Renewal in Agriculture. *Sociol. Rural.* **2021**, *61*, 602–622. [[CrossRef](#)]
8. Holloway, L.A.; Catney, G.; Stockdale, A.; Nelson, R. Family Farming Futures: Exploring the Challenges of Family Farm Decision Making through an Emotional Lens of 'Belonging'. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 12271. [[CrossRef](#)]
9. Lobley, M.; Baker, J.R.; Whitehead, I. Farm succession and retirement: Some international comparisons. *J. Agric. Food Syst. Community Dev.* **2010**, *1*, 49–64. [[CrossRef](#)]
10. Conway, S.F.; McDonagh, J.; Farrell, M.; Kinsella, A. Till death do us part: Exploring the Irish farmer-farm relationship in later life through the lens of 'Insideness'. *Int. J. Agric. Manag.* **2018**, *7*, 3–15.
11. Price, L.; Conn, R. 'Keeping the name on the land': Patrilineal succession in Northern Irish family farming. In *Keeping it in the Family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms*; Lobley, M., Baker, J., Whitehead, I., Eds.; Ashgate: Surrey, UK, 2012; pp. 93–110.
12. Riley, M. 'Letting them go'—agricultural retirement and human-livestock relations. *Geoforum* **2011**, *42*, 16–27. [[CrossRef](#)]
13. Riley, M. 'Moving on'? Exploring the geographies of retirement adjustment amongst farming couples. *Soc. Cult. Geogr.* **2012**, *13*, 759–781. [[CrossRef](#)]
14. Convery, I.; Bailey, C.; Mort, M.; Baxter, J. Death in the wrong place? Emotional geographies of the UK 2001 foot and mouth disease epidemic. *J. Rural Stud.* **2005**, *21*, 99–109. [[CrossRef](#)]
15. Rogers, M.; Barr, N.; O'Callaghan, Z.; Brumby, S.; Warburton, J. Healthy ageing: Farming into the twilight. *Rural Soc. Work Environ.* **2013**, *22*, 251–262. [[CrossRef](#)]

16. Berg-Weger, M.; Morley, J.E. Loneliness and social isolation in older adults during the Covid-19 pandemic: Implications for gerontological social work. *J. Nutr. Health Aging* **2020**, *24*, 456–458. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
17. OECD. *COVID-19: Protecting People and Societies, Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19)*; OECD: Paris, France, 2020.
18. United Nations. *The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons, Policy Brief, May 2020*; United Nations: New York, NY, USA, 2020.
19. Central Statistics Office (CSO). *Statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2018; Farms and Farmers*; Central Statistics Office: Dublin, Ireland, 2018.
20. USDA (United States Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service). *2017 Census of Agriculture Highlights; ACH17-2/April 2019*; National Agricultural Statistics Service: Washington, DC, USA, 2019.
21. Conway, S.F.; McDonagh, J.; Farrell, M.; Kinsella, A. Uncovering Obstacles: The Exercise of Symbolic Power in the Complex Arena of Intergenerational Family Farm Transfer. *J. Rural. Stud.* **2017**, *54*, 60–75. [[CrossRef](#)]
22. Lobley, M.; Baker, J. Succession and retirement in family farm businesses. In *Keeping It in the Family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms (Ashgate)*; Lobley, M., Baker, J., Whitehead, I., Eds.; Ashgate: Surrey, UK, 2012; pp. 1–19.
23. Barclay, E.; Reeve, I.; Foskey, R. Australian farmers' attitudes towards succession and inheritance. In *Keeping it in the Family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms (Ashgate)*; Lobley, M., Baker, J.R., Whitehead, I., Eds.; Ashgate: Surrey, UK, 2012; pp. 21–36.
24. Kuehne, G. My decision to sell the family farm. *Agric. Hum. Values* **2013**, *30*, 203–213. [[CrossRef](#)]
25. Srivastava, K.; Das, R.C. Personality pathways of successful ageing. *Ind. Psychiatry J.* **2013**, *22*, 1–3. [[CrossRef](#)]
26. Department of Health (DoH). *Positive Ageing—Starts Now! The National Positive Ageing Strategy (NPAS)*; Department of Health (DoH): Dublin, Ireland, 2018.
27. Ward, M. *Irish Adults' Transition to Retirement—Wellbeing, Social Participation and Health-Related Behaviours*; The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA): Dublin, Ireland, 2019.
28. Xia, N.; Li, H. Loneliness, social isolation, and cardiovascular health. *Antioxid. Redox Signal.* **2018**, *28*, 837–851. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Berg, R.; Cassells, J. *The Second Fifty Years: Promoting Health and Preventing Disability. Institute of Medicine (US) Division of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention*; National Academy Press: Washington, DC, USA, 1992.
30. Steffens, N.K.; Cruwys, T.; Haslam, C.; Jetten, J.; Haslam, A.S. Social group memberships in retirement are associated with reduced risk of premature death: Evidence from a longitudinal cohort study. *BMJ Open* **2016**, *6*, e010164. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Henning-Smith, C.; Moscovice, I.; Kozhimannil, K. Differences in social isolation and its relationship to health by rurality. *J. Rural Health* **2019**, *35*, 540–549. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Seyfzadeh, A.; Haghighatian, M.; Mohajerani, A. Social isolation in the elderly: The neglected issue. *Iran. J. Public Health* **2019**, *48*, 365–366. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Lemon, B.W.; Bengtson, V.L.; Peterson, J.A. An Exploration of the Activity Theory of Ageing: Activity Types and Life-Satisfaction among In-Movers to a Retirement Community. *J. Gerontol.* **1972**, *27*, 511–523. [[CrossRef](#)]
34. Rowe, J.W.; Kahn, R.L. Successful aging. *Gerontologist* **1997**, *37*, 433–440. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
35. Dorgan, M. *Exploring the Needs for Social Inclusion in Rural IRELAND: Ballinora a Case Study*; Community-Academic Research Links, University College Cork: Cork, Ireland, 2013.
36. Greaves, C.J.; Farbus, L. Effects of creative and social activity on the health and wellbeing of socially isolated older people: Outcomes from a multi-method observational study. *J. R. Soc. Promot. Health* **2006**, *126*, 134–142. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
37. Gallagher, C. Connectedness in the lives of older people in Ireland: A study of the communal participation of older people in two geographic localities. *Ir. J. Sociol.* **2012**, *20*, 84–102. [[CrossRef](#)]
38. Desrosiers, J.; Gosselin, S.; Lelclerc, G.; Gaulin, P.; Trottier, L. Impact of a specific program focusing on the psychological autonomy and actualization of potential of residents in a long-term care unit. *Arch. Gerontol. Geriatr.* **2000**, *31*, 133–146. [[CrossRef](#)]
39. Gyasi, R.M.; Phillips, D.R.; Abass, K. Social support networks and psychological wellbeing in community-dwelling older Ghanaian cohorts. *Int. Psychogeriatr.* **2019**, *31*, 1047–1057. [[CrossRef](#)]
40. World Health Organization. *The Global Strategy and Action Plan on Ageing and Health*; World Health Organization: Geneva, Switzerland, 2017.
41. Crabtree, L.; Tinker, A.; Glaser, K. Men's sheds: The perceived health and wellbeing benefits. *Work. Older People* **2018**, *22*, 101–110. [[CrossRef](#)]
42. Spurgin, L. Attending Social Groups Can Improve Health and Wellbeing after Retirement. 2016. Available online: <https://www.thereader.org.uk/attending-social-groups-can-improve-health-and-wellbeing-after-retirement/> (accessed on 1 September 2021).
43. Ni Leime, A.; Callan, A.; Finn, C.; Healy, R. *Evaluating the Impact of Membership of ACTIVE Retirement Ireland on the Lives of Older People*; Active Retirement Ireland: Dublin, Ireland, 2012.
44. Kelly, D.; Steiner, A.; Mason, H.; Teasdale, S. Men's Sheds: A conceptual exploration of the causal pathways for health and well-being. *Health Soc. Care Community* **2019**, *27*, 1147–1157. [[CrossRef](#)]
45. DAFM (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine). *Terms and Conditions for Early Retirement Scheme (ERS3)*; DAFM: Dublin, Ireland, 2007.
46. European Commission. *Evaluation of the Impact of the CAP on Generational Renewal, Local Development and Jobs in Rural Areas (SWD(2021) 79 Final)*; Technical Report; European Commission: Brussels, Belgium, 2021.
47. Commins, P. *Retirement in Agriculture: A Pilot Survey of Farmers' Reactions to E.E.C. Pension Schemes*; Macra na Feirme: Dublin, Ireland, 1973.
48. Gasson, R.; Errington, A. *The Farm Family Business*; CAB-International: Wallingford, CT, USA, 1993.

49. Brandth, B. Gender Identity in European Family Farming. *Sociol. Rural.* **2002**, *42*, 181–200. [[CrossRef](#)]
50. Price, L.; Evans, N. From stress to distress: Conceptualizing the British family farming patriarchal way of life. *J. Rural Stud.* **2009**, *25*, 1–11. [[CrossRef](#)]
51. Shortall, S. Changing gender roles in Irish farm households: Continuity and change. *Ir. Geogr.* **2018**, *50*, 175–191.
52. United Nations. *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing: Madrid 8–12, 2002*; United Nations: New York, NY, USA, 2002.
53. Laband, D.N.; Lentz, B.F. Occupational Inheritance in Agriculture. *Am. J. Agric. Econ.* **1983**, *36*, 311–314. [[CrossRef](#)]
54. World Health Organization. *Health and Development through Physical Activity and Sport*; World Health Organization: Geneva, Switzerland, 2003.
55. EIP-AGRI. *EIP-AGRI: 7 Years of Innovation in Agriculture and Forestry*; European Commission (DG-AGRI): Brussels, Belgium, 2020.
56. Murphy, M.; O'Connell, K. *Systemic Behaviour Change: Irish Farm Deaths and Injuries*; Department of Management & Enterprise Conference Material, Cork Institute of Technology: Cork, Ireland, 2018.
57. Glasscock, D.J.; Rasmussen, K.; Carstensen, O. Psychosocial factors and safety behaviour as predictors of accidental work injuries in farming. *Work Stress Int. J. Work Health Organ.* **2007**, *20*, 173–189. [[CrossRef](#)]
58. Teagasc. Farm Safety for Older Farmers. 2021. Available online: <https://www.teagasc.ie/news--events/daily/farm-business/farm-safety-for-older-farmers.php> (accessed on 1 October 2021).
59. Peters, K.E.; Gupta, S.; Stoller, N.; Mueller, B. Implications of the aging process: Opportunities for prevention in the farming community. *J. Agromedicine* **2008**, *13*, 111–118. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
60. Ponzetti, J. Growing Old in Rural Communities: A Visual Methodology for Studying Place Attachment. *J. Rural Community Psychol.* **2003**, *6*, 1–11.
61. EIP-AGRI. *Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation (AKIS), Systems Stimulating Creativity and Learning*; European Commission (DG-AGRI): Brussels, Belgium, 2018.
62. Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB). *Livestock Markets Serving the Industry for 200 Years, A Review of Livestock Markets in England Prepared for the Livestock Auctioneers Association (LAA)*; AHDB Beef and Lamb: Kenilworth, UK, 2017.
63. Nye, C.; Winter, M.; Lobley, M. *More Than a Mart: The Role of UK Livestock Markets in Rural Communities*; Full Report to The Prince's Countryside Fund; The Prince's Countryside Fund: London, UK, 2020.
64. Walsh, K.; O'Shea, E.; Scharf, T. Exploring Community Perceptions of the relationship between age and social exclusion in rural areas. *Qual. Ageing* **2013**, *13*, 16–26.
65. Leonard, B.; Kinsella, A.; O'Donoghue, C.; Farrell, M.; Mahon, M. Policy drivers of farm succession and inheritance. *Land Use Policy* **2017**, *61*, 147–159. [[CrossRef](#)]